

IRE Questionnaire

1) Title of story (ies) or series and names of people, including and identifying freelancers, who worked on this story.

Mary Spicuzza, Daniel Bice, Mark Johnson

a) For a partnership or collaboration, please name each entity that took part in the investigation.

2) Date(s) published, aired, or posted.

Health chief out over lead tests (Jan. 13, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2018/01/12/milwaukee-health-commissioner-bevan-baker-out-city-hall/1028152001/>

City expert raised lead concerns nearly 3 years ago (Jan. 21, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2018/01/19/long-before-milwaukee-lead-poisoning-fallout-top-mayor-tom-barrett-official-given-warning/1045389001/>

City left lead-poisoned kids at risk, report says (June 3, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2018/05/31/city-closing-many-lead-poisoning-cases-while-children-still-sick-investigation-finds/653152002/>

Twins hospitalized for lead poisoning sent back to unsafe home (Aug. 18, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2018/08/17/milwaukee-lead-crisis-twins-hospitalized-lead-sent-back-unsafe-home/1013873002/>

5 homes in 5 months -- City's slow response to lead safety (Sept. 1, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2018/08/31/milwaukee-eliminated-lead-threat-only-five-homes-five-months/951821002/>

Health officials hid lead issues (Sept. 12, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2018/09/11/city-health-officials-privately-worried-last-year-problems-messed-up-lead-program-would-become-publi/1271222002/>

Staffer stalled cleanups of homes with poisoned kids (Sept. 22, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2018/09/21/milwaukee-lead-crisis-staffer-scaled-back-home-cleanups/1379684002/>

IMPACT

Health staff under gag order (Feb. 1, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2018/01/31/concerned-aldermen-grill-milwaukee-health-department-over-new-lead-program-report/108408001/>

1 city health staffer fired, another resigns, 2 are disciplined (Sept. 15, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2018/09/14/milwaukee-lead-crisis-1-health-staffer-fired-1-quits-2-disciplined/1295711002/>

Staffer suspended for 'sabotage' amid lead crisis, records show (Oct. 4, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2018/10/02/milwaukee-lead-crisis-city-staffer-suspended-sabotage-program/1503299002/>

Health department under criminal investigation (Oct. 24, 2018)

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2018/10/23/milwaukee-lead-crisis-health-department-facing-criminal-investigation/1745061002/>

3) Topic and synopsis of story or series, including major findings.

An investigation into the troubled Milwaukee Health Department, where city staffers failed to provide follow-up services to the families of lead-poisoned children. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel broke numerous stories about how the city failed to take some of the most basic steps to protect children with lead poisoning and to prevent others from being put in danger. The reporting disclosed that high-ranking health officials were aware of the problems and intentionally hid them from the public and elected officials. The program, once considered a national model, is now under criminal investigation.

4) How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc.)?

We were working on an investigative piece about the city's health commissioner when he was abruptly fired in January 2018 amid problems with the lead poisoning prevention program. We filed approximately three dozen open-records requests, met privately with current and former health department employees,

reviewed thousands of pages of emails, text messages, disciplinary files and other records.

5) Was your work in any way based on another news organization's previously published or aired report? If yes, please provide the name and publication or air date.

No.

6) Results/impact (if any).

Our pursuit of the story heightened awareness of problems at the agency and exposed that troubles there were far deeper than we initially realized. There are now several probes into the department, including a criminal investigation

7.) The following questions deal with any documents and/or data you used; answer any that apply to your work:

- a) List any websites that were useful in obtaining documents and/or data.**
- b) Did you file any state and/or federal requests for documents and/or data?**

Yes, we filed approximately three dozen state open records requests with the Milwaukee Health Department and other local and state agencies. The records, which cost several hundred dollars to obtain, included the health commissioner's calendars, emails, text messages and other communications.

c) Did you have any difficulties obtaining information from that state or federal agency?

Yes, the city often took months to respond to records requests. And Interim Health Commissioner Patricia McManus spoke openly during a local radio interview about how she refused to respond to our records requests. She said, "I do not respond to

Dan Bice or Mary Whatever-her-name-is because... I do not respond."

i) If so, how did you resolve it?

We threatened to file a lawsuit because she was ignoring our open records requests. Much of the logjam was finally cleared after she was removed and replaced with a permanent commissioner.

d) If you obtained data, what data did you use and what was its source? What was the cost, if any?

e) Did you have difficulties with the data itself? How did you overcome them?

NA

f) Did you build any databases?

No

g) Was data analysis done by your own staff or was outside assistance used? Who?

NA

h) What specific software did you use?

NA

7) Have you run a correction or clarification on the report? Has anyone come forward to challenge its accuracy? If so, please explain.

No.

8) Difficulty, uniqueness of effort, or other special circumstances related to this subject.

Mary Spicuzza is a beat reporter who was also covering City Hall, local, state and federal elections and other breaking news. Daniel Bice is a watchdog columnist who juggles stories on various levels of government. So this investigation was often one of many stories that both of us were working on together and separately.

9) Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story.

The stories appeared throughout 2018, with each taking various amounts of time – in some cases days, in other weeks.